

Edge City 2004





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painstakingly reviewed the submissions.**

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Three Parts

by Joe Callahan

(1)

The front door
to this place
is of no use: frame shattered as if

at one time
someone kicked it in; hinges loose,
rusty, squeaky—you have to

lift it by the knob just right
and thrust with your shoulder in order
to close it. No locks or deadbolt, anyone could

waltz right in, stroll around,
make long distance phone calls, do crude things
to my toothbrush,

rearrange my closet, drawers,
make themselves dinner,
shower, clean hair out of the drain.

(2)

In the car dad said, Nothing, so
when mom asked me
I thought nothing was what

you were supposed to say
in that situation, so I said
nothing too, but I will

never forget that I was thinking about
camels and their humps
because the sloping, green hills

looked like a camel's humps and me
being a kid
I could think such things

and be happy
and never be bored
and never let anyone in.

(3)
She reads my face. She
knows things. She walks around
this place

like she owns it,
like she knows me,
like she knows

so many goddamn things,
like how to
open me right up,

and how to
close me again,
how to lift and

with her shoulder
thrust
just so.

S

by Joseph King

Soon

The sensual luxury of slowly receding time

Stops.

Before suffering the separation of the senses

Steals

The indulgence of some sophisticated scenario...

Smile

Exploring the memory of a sad misspent season.

Some

Experience, extract, and sever the mysterious.

Sense

The subtext involved in your calibrated life...

Sell

The secret sexuality inferred silently.

Solid,

The silent strength supplies evidence:

Straight

But plays well with others...

Separate the mystery from the blissful

Margaritaville

by Karen Hill

The penciled-in porch has weak
crooked legs
Its angle is all wrong

The landscape ends mid-canvas
It's there
The world just stops

No sign of life here
No people
No birds
No kits afloat above the beach

Stark barren emptiness
As deep
As the deep
Of the sun splashed sea

The “Remember the Particulars in this Story” Story

by Noel Swasta

A particular man of no particular merit lives in the south, but not so far south that the north considers him southern, nor is he so far north that the south considers him northern. It is this geographic setting that excuses him from the ideologies which northerners and southerners believe proper. He considers himself a middleman, a follower; lackadaisical, apathetic—

Do you like this so far? I thought I would start this story at the beginning, for what better place is there to start but at the beginning. Yet, I feel slightly uneasy—this isn’t actually the beginning for the man in this story, but it is a beginning to you. It may be a beginning for me too, if I want it to be, for I am the one who is constructing this scenario. Then again, it may not be me that is doing the constructing, but, rather, a self of some sort that is, ostensibly, forcing me to create the man and the place where he resides. Do you like this so far?

I am enjoying it. I appreciate being the middleman, the follower...I don’t consider myself a leader.

So the man thinks that it is going well, but what do you think? What’s next? What should the next step be? I suppose this is one way to get you to think. I also suppose that what the next step should be may not be what you think it ought to be. There is this other possibility—you may be thinking the same as I, or, rather, thinking the same as the self

that is forcing me to suggest that you and I may be thinking the same. Then there is the possibility that you have created an idea of the man inside of your mind and will find it disappointing when our ideas don't coincide. This shan't be a problem. We can gloss over the man and any possibilities pertaining to him, ignoring descriptions of him so that he may exist in your mind as a blank being, an outline, a transparent individual that has no features and no apparent disposition. All that we know is that he is a man, a particular man of no particular merit that lives in the south, but not so far south that the north considers him southern, nor is he so far north that the south considers him northern. We also can accept that it is this geographic setting that excuses him from the ideologies which northerners and southerners believe proper. He considers himself a middleman, a follower, lackadaisical and apathetic.

Now there is a problem. After claiming that I, or, rather, the self that is forcing me to make this claim, would give no description of the man, you may agree to disagree that in fact I did create a description of him—he is a blank man, an outline, with no features and no apparent disposition. Let's make him a woman instead.

I would like that very much...to be a blank woman, an outline, with no features and no apparent disposition.

Now another problem has come to light. She claims to find pleasure in what we have done with her. She is a blank woman, an outline, with no features, and no apparent

disposition...but, alas, she does have a disposition. I suppose that she did all along—at least the man did before he became a she. Let's make her angry:

I wouldn't like that at all...to be a blank woman, an outline; with no features...this totally sucks.

And now another problem—we don't have a name for her, and I, or, rather, the self that is forcing me to acknowledge this problem, may not be able to give her a name similar to what you concoct. I don't want you to become disgruntled with this problem, so to remedy this, I will call her () and you should call her (). This should suffice and everyone is contented.

We now have a female character with a temper, with the name of (), who is transparent—only an outline exists so that you can fill in the blanks.

I don't care for that name. In fact, I hate that name. This totally sucks.

She seems to be unhappy with the name ()...but is she really? I suppose that she is not, for I, or, rather, the self that is forcing me to suppose that I am creating her, am making her feel the way she feels. Watch this...

I am very pleased with that name and that description of me...I love myself.

Now that she is happy that her name, (), and that she is a transparent outline we can finally begin to write a story.

() lived a horrible life. Her father made lawn jockeys for a living, which, at the beginning of his career, had the potential to be a very fulfilling career. Ah, but alas, some lawn jockeys are just no damn good.¹

Now that we have given her some sort of background, now let's make her a he:

() lived a horrible life. His father made lawn jockeys for a living, which in the beginning had the potential to be a very fulfilling career. Ah, but alas, some lawn jockeys are just no damn good.

What's next? What would you do with him? What shall we do to this man? Take the allotted time to give him a beginning, before my beginning begins.

Was that long enough for you? If it was, we can continue. If, however, it wasn't long enough, skip ahead to the passage that begins with the symbol { < }

When he was very young () received a pet, a white weasel and he named it Skip. Skip enjoyed his new home and scurried about as if he were just dropped headfirst from heaven. () fed him, and fed him often. Skip was pleased.

Did we think similarly for ()? I see another problem. The story could potentially mutate into a story about Skip the white weasel. Didn't you think of adding Skip? Perhaps we should abandon this idea.

1. Adapted from the song "Toe Jam" by Nick Delonas:
"Ah, but alas, some toes are just no damned good."

{←}

Was that long enough for you to think? So what should we do with him? We know this much is true—he lives in the south, but not so far south that the north consider him to be southern, and not so far north that the south consider him to be northern. He is a follower, not a leader, and is transparent, an outline, with a lighthearted disposition and a father who made lawn jockeys.

I think that's all we can do with him. He hasn't a real story to tell, because he is fictitious, and, as previously stated, with no real merit. He is transparent, only an outline, with an angry disposition. His father made lawn jockeys and he isn't a leader, only a follower. Let's conclude his story then. He dies. () was hit by a truck, which was, ironically, hauling white weasels. The most interesting thing about () was that after the accident the police arrived to maintain order and they didn't have to draw an outline of () because that's all he was.

The End

How about that, was that O.K.?

I like that...it was a noble death.

Considering that you are dead, you really can't offer anything. That is, unless, I want you too...and I don't think that the person that has been calling you () really appreciates this outburst.

The End

Should I bring him back to life and talk about his experiences with lawn jockeys? No, I don't want to get into those boring details.

The End

What about his mother, we never made any connections with her. Let's quickly do that. Let's make her a model from the 1950's. Yes, a model for smocks. She left her husband and only child for a trapeze performer with the Butler and Wiley Circus, a circus that doesn't actually exist, but for our purposes, it's all right. () never knew her, and so, he and his father lived miserably making lawn jockeys.

The End

I don't think we can leave it there, for I started talking about the lawn jockeys again when I said that I wouldn't. Let's conclude, losing the lawn jockey idea, but not all together. Let's make ()'s father a coal miner instead of a lawn jockey manufacturer.

()'s father was a coal miner. He died from black lung, and () was left alone to his own devices. He believed that he would make a small fortune in the lawn jockey business, and when he was eighteen () dropped out of school and started a lawn jockey manufacturing and distribution company under the title "()'s Lawn Jockey Manufacturing and Distribution Company." However, he went bankrupt before the age of twenty. He undisputedly decided to find new employment and took a position with a

telemarketing firm telephoning old ladies, inquiring if they would enjoy *free information* on how they could *and should* start their own businesses from the comfort of their homes. He is a follower, and never found any desire to move up in the ranks—he is contented with being discontented. He eventually dies from prostate cancer.

The End

I suppose that this is as good an ending as can be. I thought I would finish the man's story at the end, for what better place is there to finish but at the end. Yet, I feel slightly uneasy—this isn't actually the ending for (), but it is an ending for you. It may be the ending for me too, if I want it to be, for I am the one that is constructing this scenario. Then again, it isn't me that is doing the constructing, but, rather, a self that is, ostensibly, forcing me to create (), his apparent disposition, his transparency—he is, after all, just an outline.

I suppose that this ought to be the ending for you. Not ()'s ending, but just an ending. I, or, rather, the self that is forcing me to call myself "I," would like to thank you for sharing our experiences in creating () and his quasi-existence. I hope that you will keep () alive in your mind so that he might continue to live in the middle of everywhere. Then again, he was an empty character, with no real use in a story. Maybe we should just abandon (). Then the story would look something like this:

The Change

by Josh Wooten

Now I've broken away.
Energy runs through my body
like electricity in water.
Running is the air I need to breathe.

I used to be Edward Scissorhands.
Quiet, hidden, alone.
Content with little activity.
Days were filled with nothing.
I was as useless as bent nails.
This I did not mind.

But boredom struck and I found old clippings
of my father who once ran
I wanted people to write of me;
I wondered if I could find fame.

So I ran.
Ran till my mind was numb.
And I ran past their expectations.
Ran like a slave—a slave to my goals.
And I ran to prove them wrong.

Scissorhands morphed into winged feet.
Running brainwashed me.
Each class forced me to wait—
wait till I got to fly.

Push till I can't feel the pain anymore.
Move when my body hurts most.
Strive when I lose faith.

I know why I'm here.
It's to run like gazelles.
Run like it's instinct.
Never stop for anything.

Aisle 8

by Joe Callahan

I have no idea what to feel
about the old woman in aisle 8
who wore
a papery dress and straw hat,
and who accidentally
shit on the floor beside her cart
and stood there,
sad-eyed and pale,
looking frightened, looking like
she didn't know
what to do or
how to fit back into
her skin.

A Life Flashes

by Kory Sponaugle

A wet slap in a hollow room. Staring at a swirling bit of color on the tip of some white plastic mobile, seeing them dance and spin, he thinks they are angels. Green mush gurgles over his lip and down his chin to a stained Ducky bib and his mother pads his chin with a towel. Stacking blocks, one on top of another, just to knock them over and see them tumble across the carpet. Babysitters who spend the day smoking and staring at the television while he totters on unsure feet, hitting his head on a coffee table once and bleeding into his eyes, the scar is still there. The colored rice box at daycare where he sifted blue, red, and green through his fingers feeling each grain tumble and tickle the sparse wrinkles of his hands. Telling a kid across the desks that he can't play with him at recess because he is busy, a childish lie, so he can play with another kid (who has a Nintendo). He goes to Sunday school and thinks Jesus is a character like Curious George and God is the Man in the Big Yellow Hat. Being switched on the first day of second grade from one class to another because of a paperwork error, he thinks he has prepared himself for nothing and cannot work in this new class, but he does, after some tears and talking to the woman in the office with the "bear chair." He tries to trick his brother into taking a bath first by telling him he'll be able to watch more tv, the lie works, and his brother hobbles past in a towel held like a cape, pleased with his trade. Building rockets in science class, his fires up

into the sky and is never found, he thinks God has stolen what he has worked so hard on. Kissing the neighbor girl under her porch, they make his brother turn around while they do it. His mother gets sick one night and his Grandma and Grandpa have to drive him to school for a week. He has to go to the new building for his Jr. High years and never really sees a certain corner of the building because none of his classes take him there and he's too afraid to go with no reason. His mother, who has been sick for two years, dies a month before his birthday in her sleep, his last words to her are, I don't know where you're going mom. He has gone to church since he was a child with his mother and father and brother, but now they don't go, she was apparently the driving force behind their religious feelings. He learns an instrument, the trumpet, as a freshman in high school and joins the marching band, he kisses girls in the back of the bus during the longer trips. He is asked by one of them to be in a play, he goes to auditions and they ask him if he can cry, he can. He does theatre until his senior year, building up a reputation as an interesting guy who has feelings, winning him many relationships that end badly. His father has to move because of his job and asks his sons what they want to do since it is his last year in high school and his brother has two more, his father stays because he knows his children need to be happy and takes minor jobs in town. His father misses graduation because of work, which seems to be making his father weaker, his father's only words when he gets home are, two more years. He decides on a university in

Pennsylvania, but he doesn't have enough money and must go to the community college. He meets a girl in his Psychology 101 class and asks her for a cup of coffee, she says she has a boyfriend, he loses his virginity to her. He gets a call sophomore year that his father has died working in a parts shop and should meet his brother at the hospital, they don't cry. He decides to return to his mother's church and meets a girl who reads every Sunday, she asks him if he wants to get a cup of coffee, they do. He runs out of money to go to college, his father didn't have very good insurance and the funeral casseroles are long gone, and he must find a job, he becomes a security guard with his brother at a filter production company. One night, a company rep comes in drunk asking where his manager is, the rep takes out a small gun and shoots his brother, who lies bleeding in the carpet while the rep runs out the sliding doors. His brother has massive brain damage and must be put into a home, he takes more jobs to pay for it. He has a heart attack and lives, his brother dies within a year, and he feels guilty for being happy about the death. He sits in a church crying about his brother, father, mother and the church girl rubs his suit-jacketed shoulder. They get married in May outside because her mother said May was nice. They make love in all the rooms of the house because they can, they love each other because they know it is all they ask. She tells him she has cancer and is going to die soon, she leaves him one night to go to a clinic in the south, he hears later that she died in big bed writing a letter to her mother. He sits up in a

hospital bed with the gown's slit down the back bent to the side and asks why he is there, he has taken a bottle of Paxil and a bottle of whiskey, his mouth is bitter with charcoal. Sitting in a church basement crying in front of strangers and asking who could do this, they tell him that God has a plan. He tells himself that maybe if he becomes a better person God will reward him: He feels it is a childish lie. He becomes an atheist, at least that is what he calls himself, he doesn't believe in God but is still afraid of him. He writes a letter to a high-ranking cardinal about God's plan and what he should do, after three weeks he gives up on a response. He spends a night screaming on his apartment building's roof and hurling vodka bottles into the sky, breaking a windshield and killing a woman on the ground. In his third year of incarceration, three men stab him in the yard because he refused to give up his slice of bread to them, and in the infirmary they press on his chest, but the gloved hands slip onto his sides because of the blood. There is no light for him to be pulled into.

A priest's eyes open deep inside a muffled pillow seeing empty faces of old men dressed in black robes around his bed. He tells them his last words as his chest rises and caves: The Lord hath sent me the wrong life to see before I leave this world, but I thank him even more that he has.

Echo and Narcissus

by Alan Caum

You are Echo, and I am Narcissus.
I see my image in a still pond,
or a mirror, or a window,
or in the face of a passing stranger,
and I must stop,
and look, and contemplate,
comb my hair, adjust my clothes,
muse upon my skin's imperfections,
and consider how and who and what I am:
I see myself everywhere
and I cannot stop looking.

You are Echo, and I am Narcissus.
You are a voice I cannot help but hear,
resounding, softly insistent:
a sweet low sound, a little throaty,
sardonic, warm, comforting, and wry,
words spoken hours ago, or days,
or a week, or a lifetime,
repeating forever in memory:
fading a little more each time
but never slipping fully out of reach.

You are Echo, and I am Narcissus.
I do not see my image in your voice
but the image of yourself,
something which does not reflect me to myself
but makes me see myself as I would not
if all I had were mirrors:
A mirror does not lie.
A mirror sees only appearance.
There is other sight than that which comes from mirrors.

You are Echo, and I am Narcissus.
I understand only by making mirrors.
You understand somehow, and then you speak,
and I no longer need mirrors;
I can see myself as I am
if I only listen
to the echo
of your voice.

Fourteen and Forty-fives

by Joseph King

Fourteen and forty-fives
Lost on the front porch of eternity;
Imagined Wisdom and irrelevant pretension
I wasted time as the first Beatle died.

Cloaked in an effusion of grey
The gift of time depreciates.
Again the odd familiar sensation
As someone important walks away...

Moments fade into something that never was
It is the *perception* of memory
Forging new angles within the mind~
Reflecting your dreams onto someone else's reality

Bruised Air

by Kory Sponaugle

Inspired by:

Painting: Sleeping Sam - Jon Laidacker

Movie: Pulp Fiction - Quentin Tarantino

What is beautiful
to touch
is rarely the same as
what is beautiful
to see.

Shoulder blades of inverted wings,
Taut stomachs of drum heads,
Combed hair parts of trimmed wheat fields,
And always the completed puzzle of muscles
that dome over their minor
connections between.

Muted, curved ivory of smoothed imperfection,
this train of vertebrae with sundry sized cars,
Goose down stomach that ebbs and tides
yielding some soft cheek and temple's rowboat,
Feathered towel hair all everywhere and feeling
its thick middles to its thin ends
like airplane wings,
The muscles that run together seamlessly
with no middlebeginningend
leave curves undulating like lover's blankets.

I cannot say:

<*touch here*>

<*look here*>

Emptying out all that does not fit like cold, hollow casings
trickling and clinking down the ugly, jagged cave of my chest
like silver house keys.

The Hour Bewildered

by Noel Swasta

A child's voice crept into Miles Bilson's ears as he opened his eyes, revealing a blanket of darkness. He instinctively held his hand out and stroked the child's head, "It will be over soon." Miles guided his free hand forward, probing for something tangible, searching for what lay between his body and nothingness. Immediately in front of him was a wall. An inch or slightly more above him was a ceiling. He gradually stepped backward, attempting to measure the distance behind him. It was impossible for him to turn around; the space between his body and confinement was minuscule. He was thoroughly enclosed, inexplicably detained.

In absolute darkness Miles evaluated the circumstances. He held his hand up to his face, straining his eyes, struggling to glimpse his appendage.

"Sir," the child spoke quietly, troubled, but with poise, "I peed myself." Miles could hear a trickle running onto the floor. Miles inadvertently pulled the child close to him. He bent forward, resting his forehead on the wall in front of him. Lackadaisically, he ran his hands across the wall, searching for an exit, a way out. He wasn't sure why he was with the child in the darkness; however, considering the situation, he wasn't fretful. This situation was somehow relative to some unknown cause. It was—

A noise from the other side of the wall startled him, and the child moved in closer, nestling into his arm. Miles knew to stay quiet. An innate sense of survival stirred through him. He didn't want to place any attention onto himself.

He wondered if he had been abducted from his home. *That isn't possible*; his last memory, before the darkness, before the child, was sitting at work at his desk, organizing the report that he had been preparing to give to his employers. It was the last step in achieving a partnership at his firm. The report was compiled of graphs, numbers and percentages, innovative theories that would take Miles to the next level of his career. His dedication to the firm would be celebrated; his employers proud—

There were voices, one male and one female, accompanied by footsteps that leisurely strolled past the wall. The floorboards creaked, lamenting with age and overuse. Perhaps the abductors had drugged him... *but who? Perhaps it's the new caretaker at the firm.* He was a strange man, shifty and anxious, but considerably friendly. He knew Miles by name, but was polite and called him Mister Bilson. He seemed to enjoy his work. Mopping and sweeping—the messes that the employees created; it was always assumed that he would clean up after them. *What was his name again?*

The voices fell distant; disintegrating into empty, hollow chatter. Miles wondered if he had amnesia, but quickly found this notion unreasonable. He could remember everything—except how he had arrived behind the wall.

Perhaps an overachieving employee at the firm hit me over the head. He knew of four other men that were in competition for his promotion. They too would have reports, mountains of numbers and figures, postulates aimed at winning his employer's admiration. It was conceivable that one of them, knowing that Miles was the prime candidate for the job, would take aggressive measures. He flipped through his memories, putting together composites of the four men, dissecting their movements, their gestures, eliminating them one-by-one until he had reached a firm conclusion of which of the four would do something so drastic. The child steadily slid down to the floor, his hands clasped tightly to Miles' leg.

He considered the other voice, the female—*what is her function in this?* Miles familiarized with no women at his firm. *Could it be Renee?* Renee was the woman that he had met at the local tavern—the tavern where people from all over town gathered. *Was she upset about last weekend* when he was invited to her flat for a nightcap? *Was she distressed that I accepted* and bedded her after five glasses of cabernet? *Was she upset that I left her after I was through,* never to acknowledge her again? Miles was sure that he wasn't the first man to have made his way into her bed, only to leave after she slipped into unconsciousness. *Was she upset enough take such dangerous measures?*

The silence became metamorphic. From a stagnant calm the voices emerged once more. They echoed into the dark prison where he and the child remained motionless. He

swallowed hard. He huffed and grumbled. He tightened his fists, placing them onto the stucco wall, preparing to beat on them. He wanted to let his feelings be known, about being a prisoner, about being caged in the dark. The child's grasp relaxed.

The voices were directly in front of him when Miles drew his hands back. He was ready to thrash at the wall, ready to flail his hands with rage and madness, ready to scream at the top of his lungs and demand his release. He was a man of stature, a man of importance. They would eventually be apprehended and thrown into prison; he would make sure of it.

Sitting in the courtroom, watching intently, waiting for the verdict, "guilty of all charges," Miles would stand and laugh mockingly. *I would be free and it is they who would be caged.* He would shake hands with the judge, thanking him for doing his duty—

The voices were not two, but now three...possibly four. They began tapping on the outside of the wall. Miles scoffed as they undoubtedly taunted him. *They want me to fuss, to become irate.* Miles would have no part of it. They weren't going to get the best of him. He would be victorious, surviving the ordeal with panache. He would walk out a hero, a venerable champion. The child fell silent.

The tapping continued, ceasing momentarily, proceeding seconds later. Miles pressed his ear against the wall. The stucco gnawed at his head. He ignored the pain,

and eagerly listened for words—keys to unlocking their objectives.

They were laughing. Miles was sickened by their immorality. He listened further, hoping to make a connection, a sound reason for his confinement. Then a word, a single utterance manifested into numbness that drilled itself into his ear, grinding at his heart: “demolition.”

His instinct to survive had been replaced with dread. He positioned his ear back to the wall, pressing harder, hoping...begging for clarification. Beyond the wall, the men talked, their voices moving in and out of earshot, accompanied by the creaking floor. “It’s time,” one of the men proclaimed.

Miles pleaded for more information—*what was it time for?* Feet shuffled about. The thunderous roars of hammers reverberated through the wall, followed by the sound of drills being pushed through the barrier. Miles was enamored by the sounds. They were going to free him.

He began to prepare himself, searching for the right words to toss at them. He worked up the courage to be harsh, violent if necessary. He then reconsidered the notion. *Perhaps I should be rational, strive to befriend the men and hope that they will find an ounce of altruism in themselves and set me free.*

He remembered the child who no longer stood close to him for protection, for guidance, for compassion. He

frivolously waved his hands around the open air, but could not find the child.

The pounding stopped. The drilling continued for a few moments after. Miles pressed his ear against the wall again, wondering if his captors were preparing to tear down the wall. He covered his eyes and primed himself for the luminosity that would surely blind him. He reassessed the idea, raising his fists for confrontation. He remembered that his decision was to be rational, befriending the men. A moment passed. Nothing happened.

After a few moments, he pushed his ear against the wall, listening for their voices. There was pity in their chatter. The female had returned, sobbing at the men. *Why does she weep?*

"We've lived here for so long." Her voice was muffled, "I can't believe that we have to tear it down." Beyond her voice, a man hollered. The dynamite was ready.

The pounding started again, completely drowning out the woman's voice. Miles covered his face, searching for answers, for solutions. *Did they forget about me?*

Against his better judgment, Miles began pounding at the wall, screaming out as loudly as he could. He searched for strength, shrieking, demanding his release—anything to get their attention. He pressed his ear against the wall. They were leaving. The voices were vanishing with their counterpart footsteps leading the way. He shouted again, fiercely pounding at the wall with his punctured hands. He skimmed

along the floor, discovering the child's body. He yelled for the child to aid him, to help him bring the men and woman back to let them out, to free them.

The child did not move.

He carelessly groped at the child's face—the skin was soft. It was as if it were sliding off the child's face. He squeezed at the child's cheeks, poking at eyes and tugging at hair. The child did not move.

Miles closed his eyes, and placed the child's limp body back onto the floor. He pushed every ounce of fear and anger from of his mind and situated himself onto the floor next to the child. There was perfect rhythm as his tears landed onto the child's body. He gently lifted the child's arms, placing them around his neck, pulling his knees to his chest, nestling next to the child, holding on tightly for protection, for guidance, for compassion—for the wall to finally come down.

"It will be over soon."

Teeth

by Joe Callahan

D. and I are stoned
and walking around Walmart
wearing these huge-framed sunglasses we grabbed
from the rack up front.

We check ourselves out

in the small mirror above them: John Lennon ones,
and funky red-framed ones, and ones like Pilots wear,
and ones like my grandma wears. The price tags hang down
and dangle onto our noses.

*

We were going to fight once.

'How much can you know about yourself
if you've never been in a fight,'

we said to each other. I even bought a mouth guard,
left it in the boiling water for 30 seconds--or whatever it was--
took it out and quickly put it in my mouth and bit down
while it was still hot and soft. The imprints of my teeth
were left on it, remembered. We never fought though.

*

On several aimless car rides on back roads
I would sit saying nothing, looking out the window
at bare trees and rain splattered the glass and the wipers
going and the music and the wispy smoke
escaping out the cracked window and the distant
horrible prospects of anything but this and the dirt road
turned into mud streams running downhill
to some place they were always always always going
to go.

*

'Something else an academic education will do for you. If
you go along with it any considerable distance, it'll begin to
give you an idea what size mind you have. What it'll fit and,
maybe, what it won't. After a while, you'll have an idea what
of thought your particular size mind should be wearing. For

one thing, it may save you an extraordinary amount of time trying on ideas that don't suit you, aren't becoming to you. You'll begin to know your true measurements and dress your mind accordingly.'

[J.D. Salinger, from Catcher in the Rye]

*

Dyeing my hair blue in a shitty public bathroom beside a rundown playground,
the useless, blown bare dirt-covered bulb swinging above my head, the heavy iron door propped open with a rock for light,
D. pissed at me
for some reason, standing just outside the door, in the gray light,
his hands in his pockets saying, 'Just hurry the fuck up.'

*

I found it the other day
in some random shoebox
amongst some papers, a little grimy and dusty,
and I went to the sink and rinsed it off. I put it in, remember
the taste; it fit basically the same.



